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Ford Action Applauded by Friends, Foes

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President Ford won the praise both of his Republican conservative critics and of his Democratic opposition yesterday for the success of his bold gamble in ordering military action to free the U.S. cargo ship Mayaguez, seized at sea by the Cambodians.

"He is always talking about Truman," a presidential intimate said after the rescue of the ship and its crew of 40. "This time he did what Harry would have done."

Until the Mayaguez action, Mr. Ford's conservative critics had considered him far more wishy-washy than Trumanesque. Yesterday, they were jubilant in their praise.

Sen. Carl Curtis (R-Neb.) lauded the action as "courageous and decisive." His words were echoed by Sens. James L. Buckley (Cons.-R-N.Y.), Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), and Barry M. Goldwater (R-Ariz.).

In California, the man most frequently mentioned as a potential Republican challenger to Mr. Ford also backed the President.

Former Gov. Ronald Reagan was taking a day off from his busy speaking schedule to rest and horseback ride at his southern California ranch, and a spokesman said, "he was very pleased with the decisiveness with which the President had acted."

This praise for the President was not limited to the Republican right. It came in somewhat more measured tones from such prominent Senate Democrats as Edmund S. Muskie of Maine, Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota and Frank Church of Idaho.

Though punctuated occa-

sionally by the criticism of a few Democrats — Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin said, "We did not even bother to give the negotiation process a fair trial"—the overwhelming congressional response was favorable.

The first tally of telegrams and telephone calls to the White House also was heavily in favor of the President's action.

White House press secretary Ron Nessen said there were 4,171 favorable telegrams and phone calls by midday yesterday about the President's action compared with 520 against.

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In the past Nessen frequently has reported adverse tallies of mail, telegrams and telephone calls to many of the President's actions, including his call for stepped-up military aid to Vietnam.

Humphrey said that public response to the President's action against the Cambodian gunboats was almost the opposite of the reaction to Mr. Ford's aid requests.

"The emotions of Vietnam were almost reversed," Humphrey said. "People wanted the ship returned."

Humphrey at first had urged caution when he learned of the seizure of the Mayaguez, saying that the government should "stop, look and listen" before acting. Yesterday he praised Mr. Ford's action, although adding that more congressional consultation would have been preferable.

A more abrupt change in position was recorded by Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), a candidate for the 1976 Democratic presidential nomination.

After the U.S. air strikes against the Cambodian patrol boats Jackson said: "I hope we are not going down the same road we followed in the Tonkin Gulf record of 1964. This is a time for cool heads, not a time to exercise the use of force . . ."

After the news of the recovery of the crew Jackson made this statement: "I must say I give him high marks for the way in which he handled it. The President deserves high marks and I would be the first to commend him. He did basically the right thing."

White House officials were restrained in assessing the political impact of the President's action although Nessen did note with a smile that Jackson had changed his position.

Both the press secretary and political counselor Robert T. Hartmann said that political considerations were never a factor in Mr. Ford's decision. "The answer would have been to do nothing," Hartmann said. "There was more to risk politically than to gain."

Beyond the question of the immediate public reaction, however, some of the President's strategists privately foresaw a long-term political plus for Mr. Ford.

One presidential intimate observed that some polls have shown substantial numbers of Americans questioning the President's leadership abilities. His decisiveness in this instance was viewed as the kind of dramatic action that could fundamentally change this attitude.

It has become almost an axiom among some of Mr. Ford's supporters that he has overdone what one of them calls "the Truman thing."

The President peppers his speeches with references to the former Democratic President. He has a bust of Truman in the oval office and a picture of him in the Cabinet room.

Yesterday, perhaps for the first time, there were comparisons being made between Mr. Ford's actions and those of Truman. Several senators in both parties also recalled the enormous gain in President Kennedy's prestige after he faced down the Soviets in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), in New York to address a UN economic conference, said that Mr. Ford had no alternative except to take the military action he ordered.

Both Sens. Muskie and Church said they were "gratified" that results of the military operation.

One of the few dissenting Democratic voices was that of 1972 presidential nominee George McGovern of South Dakota, who termed Mr. Ford's move "precipitous." But even McGovern added: "It worked and I'm glad he did it."

"It will help him with all the wings of his party—with both parties," said Sen. Gale W. McGee (D-Wyo.). "It's the single biggest boost he's had in his tenure of office."

Sen. Richard S. Schweiker (R-Pa.), a Republican moderate, said that he found his constituents "very united—including doves — on this one." Schweiker added that he had no doubts that the **action** would help Mr. Ford with the right wing of his party.

It is the Republican con-

servatives who have been most critical of Mr. Ford during his nine months in office. Yesterday they were by far the most pleased with the President's action.

"I'm glad he did it because this country needs an indication of strength and leadership in the President's office and he's finally come through with it," Goldwater said.

"I think other nations are going to leave us alone . . . Had he not done what he did, every little half-assed nation in the world would be taking shots at us, and I think now they're going to think twice before they try it.

"I thank God we have a President who has shown guts enough to do what he should have done," Goldwater added.

Helms, perhaps the President's most outspoken conservative critic in the Senate, joined in the tribute.

"He will be remembered in history for his conduct in this difficult episode," Helms said. "I for one am very proud of him today."

The President was described as heartened by these responses. He was cheered even more by the private outpouring of praise from relatives of the rescued crewmen.

The wife of one of them, Lorene Anderson of New Orleans, sent a telegram to Mr. Ford said:

"As the wife of the one of the crewmen of the SS Mayaguez, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the safety of my husband. Your handling of the situation was most admirable. The image of America must be strong. God bless you and your family."